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AXA 8

by AVENELL & Romero

THE CASTAWAY • THE SEEKER

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION SERIES

AXA 8

by Donne Avenell and Enrique Romero

THE CASTAWAY • THE SEEKER

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION SERIES™
AXA™ "The Castaway" and "The Seeker" ©1986 by Express Newspapers Ltd.
Distributed by ECLIPSE COMICS.
Published by Ken Pierce, Inc., Box 332, Park Forest, Illinois 60466.
Complete lists for a stamp.
ISBN: 0-912277-35-1

AXA

THE CASTAWAY

IN THE BUGGY GIVEN THEM BY THE AUTOMATORS, AXA AND HER COMPANIONS HAVE TRAVELLED FAR FROM THE MOUNTAINS WHERE THE MORPHOS HID THEMSELVES FROM THE WORLD . . .

AN ESTUARY . . . NO WAY TO CROSS THAT ON WHEELS . . .

THE BUGGY'S USELESS NOW, ANYWAY . . .

WE'RE DOWN TO OUR LAST DROP OF FUEL . . . AND WE SHAN'T FIND ANY HERE . . .

SO WE JUST ABANDON THE BUGGY? WE WALK?

SIMPLE PLEASURES THEY ENJOYED, DIDN'T THEY? BEFORE ONE OF THEIR DEADLIER TOYS OBLITERATED THEM!

BEAUTY QUE

UNLESS YOU WANT TO STAY HERE . . . IN THIS DERELICT HOLIDAY RESORT OF THE OLD PEOPLE . . .

Roosberg 1679

IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE A DETOUR AROUND THE ESTUARY, WE'D BETTER START WALKING!
MAYBE WE NEEDN'T MAKE A DETOUR... OR WALK, EITHER...
A BOAT USED BY THE OLD PEOPLE... STILL SEAWORTHY...
YOU MEAN TO CROSS THE ESTUARY IN THAT?
WHY NOT?
YOU'RE CRAZY, AXA! THE TIDE COULD SWEEP US OUT TO SEA! AND THERE'S A STORM BREWING!
LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE, AREN'T YOU, MATT?
OH, HELL! HAVE IT YOUR OWN WAY, AXA!
BUT THIS IS A COCKEYED BOAT! THE OLD PEOPLE MUST HAVE HAD STRONG ARMS TO MOVE IT!
I LOVE YOU, MATT! MOVE OVER!
YOU PEDAL THE BOAT WITH YOUR FEET!
NOW SHE TELLS ME!
BUT IF YOU WANT TO GET ACROSS THE ESTUARY, YOU'LL HAVE TO PEDAL HARDER THAN THAT...
THE TIDE'S EBBING... AND THE CURRENT IS SWEEPING US OUT TO SEA...

I WARNED YOU, AXA, DIDN'T I?
OH, ALL RIGHT!
WE'VE BEEN SWEPT OUT TO SEA! THERE'S A STORM BLOWING! I WAS CRAZY TO TRY AND CROSS THE ESTUARY!
DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER? BEFORE WE ALL DROWN?
THE FRAGILE BOAT COLLAPSES...
I'M NOT GOING TO DROWN, AM I? AM I?
ROBOT MARK'S CLINGING TO THE WRECKAGE... BUT THE SEA'S CARRYING IT AWAY FROM ME!
OH, MATT! I HAVEN'T LOST YOU!
WE'LL GO TOGETHER, AXA ...THE WAY WE'VE ALWAYS CROSSED THE NEXT HORIZON... HAND IN HAND...
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I NEED BOTH HANDS FOR SWIMMING...
LOOK! A BRANCH ... WITH LEAVES!
SO?
SO WE CAN'T BE FAR FROM LAND! WE'RE NOT GOING TO DROWN!
DOES LUCK JUST HAPPEN FOR YOU, AXA? OR DO YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN?

DAWN AFTER THE STORM... TWO SURVIVORS WASHED ASHORE ON A LONELY ISLAND...
AXA?
I'M HERE, MATT... AND YOU'RE NOT DREAMING... WE DIDN'T DIE OUT THERE, AND THIS ISN'T PARADISE...
IT'S THE SOLID EARTH... SAND AND ROCK AND SOIL... BEAUTIFUL AND REAL...
OH... BUT IT'S GOOD TO BE ALIVE...
I WISH THERE WAS SOMETHING I BELIEVED IN... SOMEBODY I COULD THANK...
FOR STRANDING US HERE? THANK YOURSELF, AXA!
YOU'RE ANGRY WITH ME, MATT...
SURPRISED?
WE'VE LOST ROBOT MARK... AND IF YOU'D LISTENED TO ME, WE COULD ALL STILL BE SAFE ON THE MAINLAND...
I KNOW! DON'T SAY IT! WHO WANTS TO BE SAFE?
YOU'RE REALLY BITTER, MATT, AREN'T YOU?
I'M JUST TIRED OF FOLLOWING YOU INTO DANGER...
WHY SHOULD THIS ISLAND BE DANGEROUS? IT LOOKS HARMLESS ENOUGH TO ME!
ALL WE NEED IS A CAVE TO SHELTER IN...
THERE YOU GO AGAIN!

1691
WHAT HAVE I DONE NOW?
TAKEN THE LEAD... AND EXPECTED ME TO FOLLOW YOU...
WELL THIS TIME I WON'T! YOU CAN SHELTER IN A CAVE IF YOU WANT TO... I'M STAYING OUT HERE IN THE OPEN...
ALL RIGHT! IF THAT'S THE WAY YOU FEEL!
AXA AND MATT HAVE PARTED COMPANY...
MALE PRIDE! THEY CAN'T BEAR A WOMAN TO HAVE A WILL OF HER OWN!
WELL I'M NOT GIVING IN TO MATT JUST BECAUSE HE'S A MAN... AND WHEN I KNOW I'M RIGHT...
A CAVE IS THE OBVIOUS PLACE TO SHELTER...
1693
POOR MATT... HE MUST BE WISHING HE WAS HERE IN THE CAVE WITH ME NOW...
DRY STRAW... A ROOF OVER MY HEAD... WARMTH AND SAFETY...
SQUELCH!
PLOP! SCRATCH!
WHAT WAS THAT?
1694
OH NO!
A CREATURE OUT OF A NIGHTMARE... HALF JELLYFISH, HALF CRAB...
AND THE CAVE'S CRAWLING WITH THE MUTANT HORRORS!!
1695

AXA AT BAY IN A CAVE ON THE ISLAND SEASHORE...
BACK, YOU BRUTES!
AAH!
THEY CAN STING! KILL, MAYBE!
MATT WAS RIGHT, AFTER ALL... I'D HAVE BEEN SAFER IN THE OPEN...
KRAK!
BUT THE ROCK-FALL HAS MADE A HOLE IN THE ROOF OF THE CAVE...
MOONLIGHT... AND SAFETY... IF I CAN ONLY REACH IT...
AH! THE BLESSED AIR!
I'D BETTER GO BACK TO MATT... AND ADMIT I WAS WRONG...
THERE ARE DANGERS EVEN HERE... ON AN ISLAND MILES FROM ANYWHERE, ACROSS THE SEA...
BUT THIS WHOLE SORRY WORLD IS CONTAMINATED, TO THE LAST, LONELY ISLAND...
RADIATION AND POLLUTION INFECTING THE GENES... SPAWNING MUTANTS AND HYBRIDS...
ANOTHER MUTANT?

JUST A LIZARD! OR IS IT?
FLAP!
1700
ON THIS ISLAND, A SILLY QUESTION!
A LIZARD WITH WINGS!
1701
THE ANCESTORS OF THE OLD PEOPLE BELIEVED IN DRAGONS...NOW SCIENTIFIC OVER-KILL HAS TURNED MYTH INTO REALITY...
AND WEREN'T DRAGONS ALWAYS FOUGHT WITH SWORDS?
AXA ATTACKED BY GENETIC FREAKS...
OH!
I THOUGHT THIS ISLAND WAS PARADISE WHEN MATT AND I WERE WRECKED ON IT...
1702
BUT THESE ARE CREATURES OUT OF HELL...
THE BEACH. AT LAST... BUT SHALL I FIND MATT?
YES! HE'S BUILT HIMSELF A HUT IN THE SHELTER OF THE TREES!
HE MIGHT HATE THE SIGHT OF ME, THOUGH...
1703

AXA! YOU'VE HURT YOURSELF!
OH, MATT...
I WAS AFRAID YOU'D STILL BE ANGRY WITH ME...
WHAT'S ANGER GOT TO DO WITH IT? I LOVE YOU, WOMAN!
YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT THE DANGERS OF THIS ISLAND...
OF COURSE I WAS, AXA... YOU FORGET THAT I WAS A HUNTER WHEN YOU MET ME...
I WAS RAISED IN THE WILD... WHILE YOU WERE STILL WRAPPED IN THERMAL PLASTIC IN YOUR DOMED CITY...
IF ONLY YOU'D LISTEN TO ME, SOMETIMES...
I WILL, MATT, I PROMISE...
BUT NOW I JUST WANT TO KNOW THAT YOU LOVE ME...
AND YOU DON'T NEED WORDS TO TELL ME THAT...
A NEW DAY... A FRESH START...
THE OLD PEOPLE MAY HAVE WRECKED THE EARTH, BUT THE SUN STILL RISES EVERY MORNING...
IF WE'RE GOING TO SURVIVE ON THIS ISLAND, AXA, WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO...

IF I HAD THE TOOLS, I COULD BUILD A PROPER LOG HUT WITH A STOCKADE...
POTS AND PANS WOULD HELP, TOO...AND SOMETHING BESIDES MEAT TO COOK IN THEM...
MAYBE THERE ARE WILD VEGETABLES GROWING IN THE JUNGLE...
1708
AXA EXPLORES THE ISLAND JUNGLE...
STONE WALLS! AND A PATCH OF CULTIVATION!
THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE ARE LONG GONE... BUT THEIR PLANTS SURVIVE...
AND THEIR TOOLS, AS WELL!
1709
HAVE YOU BEEN WANDERING OFF AGAIN, AXA?
THIS TIME IT'S LUCKY I DID...
LOOK WHAT I FOUND! VEGETABLES! AND TOOLS!
1710
GREAT! NOW I CAN BUILD THAT LOG HUT WE NEED!
WE CAN DO MORE THAN JUST SURVIVE ON THIS ISLAND NOW AXA... WE CAN LIVE!
AXA?
I'M BUSY!
I'M NOT JUST A PRETTY FACE AND A STRONG SWORD-ARM, YOU KNOW!
1711

A FEW MORE WEEKS PASS...
THAT'S THE STOCKADE FINISHED...WE'VE GOT A HOME NOW, AXA...
WE'LL RELAX TONIGHT... CELEBRATE...
I'LL NEED TO PREPARE, THEN...
AND NOT JUST THE HUT AND THE FOOD... BUT MYSELF...
1712
THIS ISLAND HAS CHANGED ME... REMINDED ME THAT I'M A WOMAN...
I WANT TO MAKE MY BODY BEAUTIFUL...FOR THE MAN I LOVE...
I NEED TO ADORN IT, TOO...
1713
A CELEBRATION FOR THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS...
OH... AXA...
YOU HAVE A NEW HOME, MATT... YOU NEED A NEW GIRL FOR IT...
NEW EVERY TIME I LOOK AT HER... MORE BEAUTIFUL... BUT ALWAYS MY AXA...
1714
WE HAVE TO EAT, MATT...
1715
I CAN THINK OF BETTER WAYS OF CELEBRATING...
WE LOST A WORLD, AXA, WHEN WE WERE TRAPPED ON THIS ISLAND ... BUT WE FOUND EACH OTHER!
AND TOMORROW I'VE GOT A TREAT FOR YOU...

SO WHAT'S THIS TREAT OF MINE?
YOU'VE PUT YOUR HEART INTO OUR NEW HOME, AXA...
1716
BUT I KNOW THAT WANDERLUST OF YOURS... SO TODAY WE'RE GOING TO EXPLORE THE ISLAND...
OH YES!
I ALWAYS LONG TO KNOW WHAT'S AROUND THE NEXT CORNER...
IN THIS CASE, IT'S JUST ANOTHER BAY...
BUT THAT'S NOT ALL...
1717
SEE? A WRECKED YACHT!
THE HULL'S INTACT... SO IT CAN'T HAVE BEEN HERE LONG...
TWENTY YEARS OR MORE BY THE LOOK OF IT...
BUT IF THE YACHT WAS SWEPT ASHORE UNDAMAGED... WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PEOPLE ON BOARD?
I'LL LET SOME DAYLIGHT INTO THE CABIN...
OH!
ONE OF THE PEOPLE IS STILL ABOARD...
HE JUST DIED IN HIS BUNK? AFTER THE SHIPWRECK, OR BEFORE IT?
1719

AXA FINDS A HUMAN SKELETON ON THE WRECKED YACHT...
IN HIS HAND... A DIARY...
THERE WERE THREE PEOPLE ON BOARD... A MAN AND HIS WIFE, AND THEIR CHILD...
HERE'S THE WIFE... SHE DIED IN HER BUNK, TOO...
IT'S ALL HERE IN THE DIARY... THE COUPLE WERE SAILING TO ESCAPE FROM A PLAGUE EPIDEMIC ON THE MAINLAND...
"THEY THOUGHT OF SUICIDE..."
"BUT THEY COULDN'T BEAR TO KILL THEIR BABY SON..."
"BUT IN MID-OCEAN THEY FOUND THEY WERE BOTH SICK AND DYING..."
THE PARENTS HOPED THE YACHT WOULD DRIFT ASHORE SOMEWHERE, BEFORE THEY DIED...
MAYBE IT DID... BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THEIR BABY SON?
NO TRACE OF HIM ON BOARD...
DID HE SURVIVE AND CRAWL ASHORE? ON TO THE ISLAND?
IT ALL HAPPENED TWENTY YEARS AGO... IF THE BABY SURVIVED, HE'D BE A MAN NOW...
STILL WORRYING ABOUT THE SAD OLD TALE IN THAT DIARY, AXA?
I CAN'T GET IT OUT OF MY MIND...

I'VE GOT SOME USEFUL SUPPLIES FROM THE YACHT, AXA... WE OUGHT TO BE HEADING HOME...
THE BABY BOY WHO WAS SHIP-WRECKED HERE, TWENTY YEARS AGO, HAD NO HOME...
AND NO PARENTS, EITHER... SO HE MUST HAVE DIED...
1724
WILD ANIMALS WOULD HAVE KILLED A HUMAN BABY, WOULDN'T THEY? EVEN THOSE APES?
UNLESS...
GRAAW!
OH, NO...
1724
A STRANGE ENCOUNTER, IN THE ISLAND JUNGLE...
AN APE-MAN!
OH!
THE BABY BOY WHO WAS SHIP'WRECKED HERE, TWENTY YEARS AGO ... HE GREW UP!
WHO THE HELL IS THAT, AXA?
WE HAVEN'T BEEN INTRODUCED!
BUT I READ ABOUT A CHARACTER LIKE HIM IN THE DATA BANK AT THE DOME... 20TH CENTURY FICTION INDEX...
HE WAS CALLED TARZAN!
1727

BUT HE MUST BE MORE MAN THAN APE...
YOU WANT TO BE FRIENDLY WITH ME?
HORGH!
ASK A SILLY QUESTION...
THIS COULD GET NASTY...
DON'T MAKE ME USE MY SWORD ON YOU...
GRAAW!
OHH!
HELP!
A STUPID WAY TO DIE...
I'M HERE, AXA!
OH, MATT... YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN THERE WHEN I'VE NEEDED YOU...
AND SOMETIMES WHEN YOU DIDN'T, EH?
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
WELL, YOU COULDN'T HANDLE THAT APEMAN... BUT YOU'VE HAD OTHER ADMIRERS, MORE SUBTLE THAN HIM.

I WAS ONLY JOKING, AXA...
NO YOU WEREN'T...
YOU'RE REALLY BITTER, AREN'T YOU... ABOUT THE OTHER MEN I'VE HAD IN MY LIFE?
LET'S FORGET IT... I'VE GOT YOU ALL TO MYSELF NOW, ANYWAY...
I TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT INVITING THE APEMAN TO SUPPER?
NO, OF COURSE NOT... THOUGH COME TO THINK OF IT, YOU DID FALL FOR THE BRUTE...
A JOKE, AXA! YOU FELL, REMEMBER? FROM THE TREE!
I HATE YOUR SLY LITTLE JOKES! WHY CAN'T YOU BE HONEST?
ALL RIGHT! MEETING THAT APEMAN TODAY OPENED UP ALL THE OLD WOUNDS!
YES, WOUNDS! DO YOU THINK I HAVEN'T SUFFERED, WHEN YOU'VE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH OTHER MEN?
I'M NOT BLAMING YOU, AXA... YOU'VE GOT A LOVING HEART...
BUT I ONLY LOVE YOU... AND LOSING YOU, EVEN FOR A MOMENT, KILLS ME...
I ALWAYS COME BACK TO YOU, MATT...

BIG DEAL! I CAN HAVE YOU TO MYSELF WHEN THERE'S NO ONE BETTER AROUND!
THAT'S NOT FAIR, MATT!
BUT WHAT MAN WAS EVER FAIR?
YOU'RE ALL THE SAME... GREEDY, JEALOUS, POSSESSIVE! WELL I WON'T BE POSSESSED, BY ANYONE!
AXA, STOP!
NO!
I WON'T BE CHAINED! BY FEAR, OR DUTY, OR LOVE! I MUST BE FREE!
FREE!
SEA-FOG...
AXA HAS RUN OFF ALONE, REBELLIOUSLY... INTO TROUBLE...
PERHAPS IT'S CLEARER INLAND...
OH, NO! I'VE BLUNDERED INTO A SWAMP!
FREEDOM, I WANTED ... AND NOW THE MUD'S CLINGING TO ME...
AND IT'S NOT THE ONLY DANGER IN THE SWAMP...
THIS ISLAND BREEDS GROTESQUE MONSTERS...
HISSS!

A GIANT SWAN ? THE HEAD AND NECK OF ONE, AT LEAST...
HISSS!
I CAN DEAL WITH THAT...
BUT MUTANT GENES HAVE TURNED ITS BODY INTO A SNAKE'S !
OH, NO! THE SNAKE'S A CONSTRICTOR!
IT'LL CRUSH ME TO DEATH IN ITS COILS!
UNLESS I DROWN FIRST!
ONLY ONE CHANCE... A BLIND STAB AT THE MONSTER'S HEAD...
GUARRG!
THE SNAKE BODY HAS GONE LIMP... IT'S UNCOILING...
I'VE KILLED THE MONSTER...
BUT I'LL DIE MYSELF... IF I DON'T FIND WARMTH AND SHELTER SOON...
NO COMFORT HERE ON THE ISLAND BEACH... BUT I CAN'T DRAG MYSELF ANY FURTHER...

AXA ALONE... AND SINKING INTO A FEVERISH DOZE...
MATT... I NEED YOU ...OH, MATT...
BUT I REJECTED HIM... HE WON'T COME TO ME NOW...
EXCEPT IN A NIGHTMARE... TO ACCUSE ME...
SO MANY MEN I'VE LOVED... OR HATED... OR SOMETIMES BOTH, WITH THAT UN-DISCIPLINED HEART OF MINE...
JON, IN THE DOMED CITY...
THE MUTANT, BURT...
DIRK, THE ISLAND SOPHISTICATE...
THE TYRANT NERO, AT THE CITY OF HOPE...
CAP, THE RUTHLESS WRECKER...
THE LAWLESS GYPSY, DJANGO...
VIKTOR, THE MAN IN THE MASK...
AXA HAUNTED BY THE MEN IN HER PAST...
NO! THE APEMAN!
LET ME GO!
GENTLY, AXA... IT'S MATT... YOU'RE SAFE NOW...
MATT! IT'S REALLY YOU?
IN THE FLESH... UNLIKE THOSE GHOSTS FROM YOUR PAST...
OH, MATT... I DO LOVE YOU...
I WAS A FOOL TO DOUBT IT...
WE CAN TALK ABOUT IT LATER... WHEN I'VE NURSED YOU BACK TO HEALTH AND STRENGTH...

IT COULD BE A TOUGH FIGHT, TOO... YOU'RE VERY SICK AND WEAK...
YOU NEED PLENTY OF NOURISHING FOOD...
1748
DON'T LEAVE ME, MATT...
NEVER AGAIN, AXA...
AXA SICK, AFTER HER ORDEAL IN THE SWAMP...
YOU NEED FOOD... I WON'T BE LONG...
1749
OH, MATT... YOU HAD TO HUNT FOR IT?
I'LL HAVE TO COOK IT TOO, WON'T I?
HERE, AXA... TRY TO EAT...
DAYS LATER...
YOU NEVER GIVE UP, DO YOU? BUT YOU'RE NOT STRONG ENOUGH YET TO EVEN LIFT YOUR SWORD!
OH, MATT, YOU'RE SO GOOD TO ME...
JUST CALL IT LOVE...
1750
YOU CAN SIT OUT IN THE SUNLIGHT TODAY, AXA...
AFTER WEEKS OF DEVOTED NURSING BY MATT...
HE'S SO LOYAL... SO UNDEMANDING... IS THAT WHY I'VE ALWAYS TAKEN HIM FOR GRANTED?
1751
A PRESENT FOR YOU... SOMETHING I KNOW YOU'LL APPRECIATE...

IT'S PRETTY, MATT, BUT WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT A CONCH SHELL?
HOLD IT TO YOUR EAR...
OH, MATT... THE MURMUR OF A FARAWAY SEA...
YOU UNDERSTAND ME, DON'T YOU? THE WANDERLUST IN MY BLOOD!
MORE WEEKS HAVE PASSED...
RESTLESS, AXA?
NO... NO, I WAS JUST WAITING FOR YOU...
I LOVE YOU, MATT... I'D BE HAPPY TO STAY HERE FOR EVER, ALONE ON THIS ISLAND WITH YOU...
BUT YOU'D STILL LOOK LONGINGLY AT THE HORIZON...
YOU'D SEE MORE HORIZONS, AXA, FROM THAT PEAK AT THE CENTRE OF THE ISLAND...
WHY NOT STRETCH YOUR LEGS... TAKE A WALK UP THERE TODAY...
AREN'T YOU COMING WITH ME?
NO... I'VE GOT WORK TO DO...
MATT'S TRYING SO HARD... AND I'VE LEARNT TO VALUE HIS UNSELFISHNESS NOW, HIS LOVE FOR ME...
BUT THIS ISLAND IS STILL A PRISON...
AND WE'VE BEEN GIVEN A LIFE SENTENCE, MATT AND I... IN SOLITARY CONFINE-MENT...

WHAT WAS THAT?
KUK!
SOMEONE FOLLOWING ME? MATT?
NO...!
UUH!
UUH!
HORGH!
AXA ATTACKED BY THE APEMAN...
AXA A VICTIM OF THE APE-MAN...
HARGH!
CHAK CHAK
CHAK
...A SHIPWRECKED HUMAN CHILD, REARED BY THE ISLAND APES...
SKEECH!
GRAAW!
THE APES ARE JEALOUS OF AXA...
HARGH!
CHAK-CHAK!
THE APEMAN FIGHTS OFF HIS BESTIAL FOSTER FAMILY...
HISSS!

AS AXA RECOVERS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CAVE OF THE APES...
SKREEK!
UUH...
OH NO! THE APEMAN BROUGHT ME HERE...
AND NOW HE'S FIGHTING FOR ME ... A LOVER DEFENDING HIS MATE...
1760
MAYBE I OUGHT TO HELP HIM...
ON THE OTHER HAND HE'S AN APE-MAN... RAISED BY THOSE BEASTS HE'S FIGHTING...
1761
AND IT'S STUPID TO GET INVOLVED IN A FAMILY QUARREL!
SO LET'S GET OUT OF HERE...
CHAK CHAK!
CHUK-CHUK-CHUK!
DAMN! ONE OF THE APES HAS SPOTTED ME!
THE FLAT OF MY SWORD WILL DISCOURAGE HIM...
SKREEK!
1763
TRUST THAT APEMAN TO NOTICE WHAT'S HAPPENING...
HURGH!
BUT I'VE GOT A HEAD-START ON THE POOR, MIXED-UP BRUTE...

IT'S DARK OUTSIDE... YET THE SUN'S STILL HIGH...
Romero
BLACK FLAKES, FALLING FROM THE SKY...
IT'S VOLCANIC ASH!
1764
THIS ISLAND'S GOT EVERYTHING... MAGIC AND MONSTERS...
A TARZAN RAISED BY THE APES...
NOW AN ERUPTING VOLCANO!
AND I'M TRAPPED BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM...
Romero
1765
THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT...
AKA TRAPPED BY THE APEMAN ON THE SLOPES OF THE VOLCANO...
BROKEN GROUND IN THIS DIRECTION... AT LEAST IT MIGHT SLOW DOWN THE MOLTEN LAVA...
1766
HELL! IT'S SLOWED ME DOWN AS WELL!
BUT THERE'S A FALLEN TREE, SPANNING THE RAVINE...
IF I COULD CROSS THAT, I'D BE SAFE FROM THE MOLTEN LAVA AT LEAST...
AND I'LL WORRY ABOUT THE APEMAN WHEN I'VE DONE MY TIGHTROPE-WALKING ACT...
Romero
1767

BUT I'M A GLUTTON FOR PUNISHMENT, AREN'T I ?
MOLTEN LAVA ABOVE ME... A LUSTFUL APEMAN BEHIND ME... AND NOW A DEATH-DROP BELOW ME...
AND I FORGOT THAT THE APEMAN IS A BETTER ACROBAT THAN ME!
1768
HARGH!
THIS IS HARDLY THE TIME AND PLACE FOR A RAPE! LET ME GO!
ULP! HE DID!
1769
THAT'S ALL WE NEEDED...
THE MOLTEN LAVA'S SET FIRE TO THIS TREE TRUNK BRIDGE ACROSS THE RAVINE...
DEATH... IF I DON'T REACH THE FAR SIDE...
1770
PHEW! MADE IT!
KRAAK!
BUT THE APEMAN HASN'T...AND THE TREE'S BURNT THROUGH, FALLING...
HE'S JUMPED BACK THE OTHER WAY... THE POOR DOOMED BRUTE!

BUT PERHAPS THE APE-MAN HAS SURVIVED...
IF HE ESCAPES THE MOLTEN LAVA FROM THE VOLCANO, HE COULD BE REUNITED WITH HIS FAMILY...
THEY'RE APES, AND HE'S A MAN... BUT THAT WOULD BE TRAGIC ONLY IF HE REALISED THE TRUTH ABOUT HIMSELF...
1772
I'M SAFE FROM THE APEMAN NOW, AND FROM THE VOLCANO...
I'LL HEAD TOWARDS THE ISLAND COAST... BUT FIRST I NEED SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT...
1773
A GIANT MOTH! MORE DANGER!
NO... I'VE I GOT THE HOLLOW TREE TO MYSELF... AND HERE'S A BONUS...
A COCOON, LEFT BEHIND BY THE GIANT MOTH... WARM AND SOFT, A LUXURIOUS BLANKET OF SILK...
THE WORLD'S A WONDERFUL PLACE, AT DAWN... WHEN YOU'VE SLEPT WELL...
1774
AXA REACHES THE ISLAND COAST...
MATT WILL BE WORRYING ABOUT ME... BUT I CAN FOLLOW THE SHORE-LINE BACK TO THE HUT...
OH, BUT IT'S GOOD TO BE ALIVE!
1775

I MIGHT AS WELL TAKE A LOOK INTO THE NEXT BAY...
SO THE ISLAND'S NOT UNINHABITED...
PRIMITIVE HUTS... CRUDE BOATS... A NATIVE VILLAGE...
AND THE PEOPLE GATHERED ON THE BEACH...
1776
Romero

THE ISLANDERS ARE HOLDING SOME KIND OF RELIGIOUS CEREMONY...
THEY'RE ON THEIR KNEES... WORSHIPPING THAT GLEAMING FIGURE ON THE THRONE, WHO MUST BE THEIR GOD...
A GOD, DID I SAY? HE'S EVEN MORE FABULOUS THAN THAT!
1777

AXA DISCOVERS A PRIMITIVE COMMUNITY ON THE ISLAND... AND RECOGNISES THE GOD WORSHIPPED BY THE SAVAGES...

MARK! IT'S ME, AXA!
I THOUGHT YOU WERE DROWNED IN THE STORM WHEN WE REACHED THE ISLAND!
ASSUMPTION WAS MUTUAL. SCANNERS CAN HARDLY BE CREDITED.
THE ISLANDERS SEEM STRUCK BY THE SIGHT OF ME, TOO!
1779

OH, MARK! YOU'RE ALIVE!
OPERATIVE IS PRECISE WORD
OH I KNOW YOU'RE JUST A ROBOT! BUT I LOVE YOU!
HEM... BLIP... HRMPH...
POOR INHIBITED OLD MARK! THE NATIVES ARE MORE DEMONSTRATIVE THAN YOU!
1781
THEY'RE STROKING MY BODY! ARE THEY GOING TO MAKE A GODDESS OF ME?
HMM... NOT EXACTLY...
ALL STRANGERS TO THE ISLAND ARE GREETED WITH JOY BY THESE PRIMITIVES
JOY, DID YOU SAY? THEY'VE GOT AN ODD WAY OF SHOWING IT!
THEY'RE DRAGGING ME AWAY! BUT YOU'RE A STRANGER HERE TOO, MARK, AND THEY TREAT YOU WITH REVERENCE!
AH, BUT MY BODY IS MADE OF METAL. AND YOURS IS, HEM... DELECTABLE FLESH...
1782
THESE PRIMITIVES, I REGRET TO SAY, ARE ...CANNIBALS!
YOU MEAN THEY'RE GOING TO EAT ME?
EXACTLY. AFTER COOKING YOU, OF COURSE
WELL DON'T JUST STAND THERE! DO SOMETHING!
FUNCTIONING

AXA CAPTURED BY CANNIBALS...
YOU'RE GOING TO LET THEM MAKE A MEAL OF ME? YOU DON'T CARE, MARK?
SIZZZ!
PATIENCE, WOMAN...
GIVE MY CIRCUITS TIME TO ENERGISE...
MARK'S DISTRACTED THE SAVAGES... GIVEN ME THE CHANCE I NEEDED...
YOU CERTAINLY GET SOME SPECTACULAR EFFECTS WITH THAT ELECTRONIC BODY OF YOURS!
AT LEAST THE NATIVES APPRECIATE ME. TO THEM I AM A GOD, NOT JUST A ROBOT
I APPRECIATE YOU TOO, MARK... BUT A GIRL GETS NERVOUS WHEN SHE'S ABOUT TO BE COOKED AND EATEN!
KRAKK!
HUH?
JUST A DISCHARGE OF EXCESS ENERGY FROM MY CIRCUITS
BUT TO THE SAVAGES A FIREBALL! THE ANGER OF THEIR GOD!
I SUGGEST WE RUN, WHILE THE NATIVES ARE PROSTRATE...
GOOD IDEA!
I LEFT MY SWORD ON THE BEACH...
THAT'S BETTER! THOUGH A GIRL'S BEST PROTECTION AGAINST CANNIBALS IS A ROBOT CALLED MARK!

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT AHEAD!
AXA AND ROBOT MARK TREK BACK TOWARD THE LOG HUT ON THE ISLAND COAST...
MATT HUNG A LANTERN ON THE STOCKADE, TO GUIDE ME HOME...
AND EVEN FOR A WANDERER LIKE ME, IT IS HOME...WHERE THE HEART IS...
WAITING UP FOR SOMEONE, MATT?
AXA?
TOUCH ME... I'M REAL...
I THOUGHT I'D LOST YOU...
NOW I KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE, ANYWAY... WHEW...TO BE CAUGHT IN A VOLCANIC ERUPTION...
AXA REUNITED WITH MATT...
I BROUGHT SOMEONE ELSE BACK, FROM THE DEAD...
ROBOT MARK! I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE GLAD TO SEE THAT MECHANICAL MONSTROSITY AGAIN!
CHARMING!
BUT I KNOW WHEN I'M NOT WANTED...
NEXT MORNING...
I THINK WE'VE HURT MARK'S FEELINGS...
THIS STOCKADE IS MEANT TO GIVE PROTECTION? PITIFUL!
YOU DON'T BOTHER ME, ROBOT... AND WE SHAN'T NEED A STOCKADE MUCH LONGER, ANYWAY...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MATT? WHY SHAN'T WE NEED A STOCKADE?
I TOLD YOU THERE WERE CANNIBALS ON THIS ISLAND...
YES... IT'S NOT THE EARTHLY PARADISE WE THOUGHT IT WAS...
1792
AND I KNOW THAT TO YOU, AXA, IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A PRISON...
SO TAKE A LOOK AT THE COVE DOWN THERE...
1793
OH, MATT...
A RAFT...
WITH A SAIL, AND A RUDDER... SEAWORTHY, IN FACT...
I'VE BEEN WORKING ON HER FOR THE PAST FEW WEEKS... A SECRET PROJECT, YOU MIGHT CALL IT...
SO WE CAN ESCAPE FROM THE ISLAND, ON THIS RAFT...
WHENEVER YOU WANT TO...
1794
OH, MATT! YOU DID THIS FOR ME! EVEN THOUGH YOU'D RATHER WE STAYED HERE FOR EVER!
I LOVE YOU, AXA... TOO MUCH TO KEEP YOU LOCKED IN A PRISON...
A FEW DAYS LATER...
A RUDDER IN MY HAND... A NEW HORIZON TO STEER FOR...
AND YOU MADE THIS POSSIBLE, MATT.. BUILDING A SEAWORTHY CRAFT FOR ME... SACRIFICING YOUR OWN HEART'S DESIRE...
1795
I CAN'T KEEP YOU TO MYSELF, AXA, MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO ... I HAVE TO SHARE YOU WITH THE WORLD...

AXA
THE SEEKER
THE ISLAND AND A WILDERNESS OF WATERS BEHIND THEM, AXA AND HER COMPANIONS MAKE ANOTHER LANDFALL...
THIS IS A NEW CONTINENT, AXA...
NO... JUST AN OLD ONE WITHOUT A HISTORY...
PEOPLE MAKE HISTORY, AND HERE THE GREAT CONTAMINATION HAS REPLACED THEM WITH PLANTS...
NOTHING BUT JUNGLE, AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE...
AT LEAST THE ISLAND HAD INHABITANTS... EVEN IF THEY WERE CANNIBALS...
THERE'S NOTHING HERE BUT TREES...
STRANGE TREES, THOUGH!..
YES... WITH IRON HOOKS IN PLACE OF TWIGS!

THAT'S NO JUNGLE-CREEPER!
THE TREE'S MORE LIKE ONE OF THOSE WEIGHT-SHIFTING MACHINES OF THE OLD PEOPLE...
A CRANE! LIFTING OUR RAFT FROM THE WATER!
OH NO!
THE RAFT IS BREAKING LOOSE!
CRAAK!
IT'LL STILL FLOAT, AXA! WE CAN ESCAPE BY WATER!
BUT ESCAPE FROM WHAT?
IF THIS IS A CRANE, THERE MUST BE MEN OPERATING IT...
HUR HUR HUR!
MEN WITH A WARPED SENSE OF HUMOUR...
SO LET'S SHARE THE JOKE WITH THEM...
YES, THE CRANE'S BEEN DISGUISED TO LOOK LIKE A TREE...
AND CAMOUFLAGE NETTING HUNG TO SCREEN IT FROM THE WATER...
WHY ALL THE MYSTERY?

I ASKED YOU A QUESTION!
ALL RIGHT... IF YOU WON'T ANSWER..
NO! MERCY!
DON'T GROVEL! IT'S NOT YOU I MEAN TO CUT DOWN, IT'S THE NETTING!
NOW LET'S SEE WHAT'S BEHIND THE CAMOUFLAGE...
A QUAY...STACKED FREIGHT, AND THE CRANE TO LOAD IT ON TO BOATS WHEN THEY COME ALONGSIDE...
THE ESTUARY IS INFESTED WITH PIRATES... WE HAVE TO HIDE OUR OPERATIONS FROM THEM..
SO WHAT KIND OF FREIGHT DO YOU HANDLE?
AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
THESE ARE TRADE SECRETS! NOT OURS TO REVEAL!
NO! DON'T BREAK OPEN THE CRATE! PLEASE!
YOU'LL GET THESE MEN INTO TROUBLE IF YOU OPEN THE CRATES, AXA...
THEY WRECKED OUR RAFT, DIDN'T THEY? AND I HATE MYSTERIES!
AT LEAST THEY COULD TELL US WHERE THE FREIGHT COMES FROM...

THERE MUST BE SOME KIND OF INDUSTRIAL CENTRE NEAR HERE...
YES...
1806
IT'S AWAY IN THE JUNGLE ...THE CANAL LINKS IT WITH THE ESTUARY AND OUR QUAY...
I'M NOT EXPLORING THE CANAL, AXA, AND THAT'S FLAT!
I MIGHT AS WELL SAVE MY BREATH, AXA, WHEN YOUR CURIOSITY'S AROUSED...
IT'S NOT JUST CURIOSITY... I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING ABOUT THIS PLACE...
AS THOUGH I'D BEEN HERE BEFORE...
1807
PEOPLE...ON THE CANAL BANK AHEAD...
MAYBE WE'RE NEAR THE MYSTERIOUS INDUSTRIAL CENTRE...
1808
THOUGH THIS IS SOME KIND OF PLANTATION ... AND THEY'RE PEASANTS...
1809
WE'RE LOOKING FOR... WELL, A BIG FACTORY...
ALL GONE...
USED TO BE CALLED PILL CITY... WAY BACK, BEFORE THE JUNGLE CAME...
THESE PLANTS THEY'RE CULTIVATING AREN'T EDIBLE... TASTE BITTER...

1810
CAN WE GO WITH YOU?
IF YOU LIKE... TIME TO SLEEP, NOW...
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THIS IS THEIR HOME?
ALL THAT'S LEFT OF THE INDUSTRIAL CENTRE WE WERE LOOKING FOR... PRE-CONTAMINATION, OBVIOUSLY... AND THE PEASANTS ARE SQUATTING IN THE RUINS...
CAN WE STAY HERE?
SLEEP, YES... TOMORROW WILL BE DREAMTIME...
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WHAT DID HE MEAN BY THAT?
DON'T ASK ME... THOSE PEASANTS ACT AS IF THEY'RE DRUGGED...
YES... THAT'S AN IDEA!
1811
THIS IS THE FIRST NIGHT WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER FOR WEEKS, AXA...
A GOOD NAME FOR IT... DREAMTIME...
YOU MEN!
1812
WELL! HE JUST WENT STRAIGHT TO SLEEP!
DAWN, IN THE PLANTATION SETTLEMENT...
THE PEASANTS ARE OUT EARLY...
SORRY ABOUT LAST NIGHT, AXA... I DON'T KNOW WHAT HIT ME...
1813
I DO! THAT PLANT YOU TASTED YESTERDAY! IT WAS A NARCOTIC!

1814
YOU HEARD WHAT THEY CALLED THIS PLACE IN PRE-CONTAMINATION DAYS... PILL CITY!
IT MUST HAVE BEEN A CENTRE FOR THE MANUFACTURE OF DRUGS! AND IT STILL IS!
SO THESE PEASANTS CULTIVATE THE RAW MATERIAL... BUT WHO PROCESSES IT?
WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT...
THE DISPENSERS! THEY COME!
FROM THE SKY?
THE CABLE STRETCHES UP THROUGH THE JUNGLE CANOPY, ANYWAY...
AND WHOEVER OPERATES THAT SOPHISTICATED CABLE-CAR MUST HAVE THE TECHNICAL SKILL TO PROCESS DRUGS...
AGAIN THE QUEER FEELING... THAT I'VE SEEN ALL THIS BEFORE...
YOU HAVE THE SAMPLES?
YES, DISPENSER!
PUT THEM IN THE CAPSULE, THEN...
STAY OUT OF THIS, AXA...
I MUST KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON...
HERE'S YOUR REWARD, PEASANT!
AH! DREAMTIME AGAIN!
SO THAT'S IT...
THE PEASANTS GROW THE NARCOTICS FOR YOU! AND GET A DRUG-TRIP IN RETURN!

A STRANGER, EH? YOUNG, ATTRACTIVE, AND FEMALE! QUINN WILL WANT TO MEET YOU!
BUT PERHAPS I DON'T WANT TO MEET QUINN...
WATCH IT, AXA! HE'S REACHING FOR A GUN!
WRONG, MY FRIEND... ...WE DISPENSERS DON'T NEED GUNS.
YOU'RE NOT USING THAT HYPO ON ME!
SPIRITED, TOO!
QUINN WILL LIKE THAT... BUT WE MUST TRANQUILISE YOU FIRST!
OH!
AXA DRUGGED BY THE DISPENSERS...
UUH!
LEAVE HER ALONE!
NEUTRALISE HIM, SALCO...
SHE'S YOUR WOMAN, EH? OURS NOW!
WHAT HAVE YOU DRUGGED US WITH?
JUST A MUSCLE-RELAXANT...
TAKE THE MAN TO YOUR SETTLEMENT, PEASANTS, AND HOLD HIM...
WE'LL DEAL WITH THE METAL MAN, TOO!
MY BODY'S PARALYSED...
TEMPORARILY... AND YOUR SENSES ARE FUNCTIONING...

PITY TO DEPRIVE YOU OF A GREAT EXPERIENCE... YOUR FIRST SIGHT OF THE WEB...
1822
THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE TAKING ME? UP ABOVE THE JUNGLE CANOPY?
JUST LOOK, WOMAN...
OH, WONDERFUL!
AXA STARES FROM THE DISPENSERS' CAPSULE...
I SEE WHY YOU CALL IT THE WEB...
ABOVE THE JUNGLE, HIGH IN THE SKY, A GREAT SPIDER'S WEB OF STEEL CABLES....
ANCHORED AT THE PERIMETER BY THE DERELICT TOWER BLOCKS OF A RUINED CITY...
BUT HE SAID THIS WAS MY FIRST SIGHT OF IT... AND I COULD SWEAR I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE...
1823
YOU'RE TAKING ME TO THE CENTRE OF THE WEB?
RIGHT...
A GREAT CRYSTAL SPHERE...
OPERATIONS COMPLEX OF THE DISPENSERS...
WHERE THE SPIDER LIVES?
WE CALL HIM QUINN...
1824
YOU'RE UNEASY, WOMAN... NO NEED TO BE AFRAID...
1825
I'M NOT... IT'S JUST THAT THIS SPHERE OF YOURS BRINGS BACK MEMORIES...
...OF THE DOMED CITY I GREW UP IN? OR OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO ME EVEN EARLIER!

CONTROLLER
WHY DO PEOPLE LIKE THIS QUINN OF YOURS ALWAYS CALL THEMSELVES CONTROLLERS?
BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THEY DO... CONTROL...
NOT ME, THEY DON'T!
A REBEL, EH? AND AN EXCEEDINGLY PRETTY ONE!
1836
WE FOUND HER WITH THE PEASANTS, QUINN... DOWN BELOW IN THE JUNGLE...
THIS IS HOW YOU LIKE YOUR WOMEN, IS IT? PARALYSED AND HELPLESS?
1837
YOU DO ME AN INJUSTICE, GIRL!
1838
THE DRUG WILL SOON WEAR OFF ...MEANWHILE WE CAN TALK...
SO TELL ME ABOUT THIS PLACE YOU CONTROL...
PILL CITY? THAT'S WHAT THE OLD PEOPLE CALLED IT...
IT WAS THE HEAD-QUARTERS OF AN INTERNATIONAL DRUG COMPANY...WRECKED DURING THE GREAT CONTAMINATION...
THE SURVIVING CHEMISTS MANAGED TO CONTINUE PRODUCTION UNDERGROUND... BUT WE, THEIR DESCENDANTS, FELT STIFLED BY THE JUNGLE WHICH PROVIDED THEIR RAW MATERIALS...
THEN ONE DAY, IN RETURN FOR THE DRUGS THEY WANTED, SCIENTISTS FROM A DOMED CITY OFFERED TO BUILD US A NEW HOME IN THE SKY...
THE WEB WAS ERECTED SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO, BY A WORKFORCE FROM THE DOMED CITY...
OH!
1839

WHAT'S WRONG? YOU SHOULDN'T BE GETTING WITH-DRAWAL SYMPTOMS!
IT'S NOT THE DRUG THAT'S BOTHERING ME ... IT'S SOMETHING YOU SAID ...
ABOUT A WORKFORCE FROM THE DOMED CITY COMING HERE ... TWENTY ODD YEARS AGO, WHICH WAS WHEN I WAS BORN ...
COME AND SEE THE REST OF THE SPHERE ... IF YOU'VE RECOVERED ...
THE DRUG'S WORN OFF, YES ... BUT THE SHOCK WAS JUST A CHORD YOU TOUCHED, A MEMORY ...
AM I IMAGINING THINGS? OR HAVE I REALLY BEEN HERE BEFORE?
AS I WAS TELLING YOU, THE DOME SCIENTISTS BUILT US THIS NEW HOME IN THE SKY ...
LABORATORIES, TOO, WHERE WE MANUFACTURE DRUGS FOR A WORLD STILL SUFFERING FROM POST-DISASTER NEUROSES ...
NARCOTICS! PLACEBOS!
AND WHY NOT?
I FEAR YOU SUFFER FROM MORAL INDIGNATION, MY DEAR — MOST UNCOMFORTABLE ...
AND DO YOU DISPENSERS HAVE A DRUG FOR THAT?
OF COURSE .. BUT WE ALSO HAVE THIS ELEGANT AND LUXURIOUS SPHERE ...
FOR YOU I PRESCRIBE A SPOT OF GRACIOUS LIVING ...

AH... COMFORT...
SO RELAX, MY DEAR... AND LET'S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER...
UP TO YOUR OLD TRICKS, QUINN?
OH, VITA... YOU PROMISED TO STAY IN YOUR OWN QUARTERS...
THEY TOLD ME YOU HAD A NEW GIRL IN HERE! NATURALLY I HAD TO SEE HER FOR MYSELF!
WHY, SHE'S YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE MY DAUGHTER!
YOU HEARD ME! THAT GIRL'S YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE MY DAUGHTER!
THE BABY DAUGHTER I LOST, TWENTY YEARS AGO!
SEDATE HER, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
NO! LET HER TALK!
HASN'T SHE SAID ENOUGH?
VITA'S CONFUSED... HAS BEEN FOR YEARS... JUST IGNORE HER...
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! I CAN'T IGNORE IT!

CALM DOWN, MY DEAR...
OR YOU'LL DRUG ME, EH ?
THAT SEEMS TO BE THE ANSWER TO EVERY PROBLEM FOR YOU DISPENSERS !
BUT YOU'RE NOT A NEUROTIC MIDDLEAGED WOMAN LIKE VITA...
A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP WILL PUT YOU RIGHT...
NO ONE WILL DISTURB YOU IN THIS GUEST-ROOM...
IT'S NOT PEOPLE WHO DISTURB ME... IT'S MY OWN EMOTIONS...
AND QUINN'S WIFE HAS RAISED A GHOST WHICH HAS HAUNTED ME ALL MY LIFE...
WHAT WAS IT VITA SAID? THAT I WAS YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE HER DAUGHTER?
AND THEN THAT SHE'D LOST HER BABY GIRL, TWENTY YEARS AGO... WHEN THE WEB WAS BEING BUILT BY A WORKFORCE FROM THE DOMED CITY...
IT'S USELESS, I CAN'T SLEEP! I'VE GOT TO KNOW!
VITA'S ROOM SHOULDN'T BE HARD TO FIND...
BUT THE DISPENSERS MUSTN'T SPOT ME ...THEY'RE TOO READY WITH THOSE HYPOS OF THEIRS...
IS THAT HOW QUINN'S WIFE BECAME A DRUG-ADDICT? SO MANY QUESTIONS... AND I NEED ANSWERS...

OH NO... DON'T THESE DISPENSERS EVER SLEEP?
NO GUARD ON VITA'S DOOR?
NOT EVEN LOCKED! SHE WON'T BE OPENING IT TONIGHT!
BUT I WILL...
VITA? ARE YOU AWAKE?
NO. THEY SEDATED HER... BUT MAYBE I CAN ROUSE HER TO ASK THAT ONE BURNING QUESTION...
IS SHE MY MOTHER?
AXA IN SEARCH OF HER PAST...
VITA! WAKE UP!
WE'VE GOT TO TALK! I MUST HAVE ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS!
HUH?
PLEASE! FOR BOTH OUR SAKES!
WHAT DO YOU WANT? WHO ARE YOU?
THEY CALL ME AXA...
BUT PERHAPS YOU CALLED ME SOMETHING ELSE... WAY BACK... WHEN I WAS BORN...
LISTEN! THINK! TALK TO ME!

YOU HAD A BABY TWENTY THREE YEARS AGO... A GIRL?
YES...
YES...
AND THE FATHER WAS A DOME SCIENTIST... ONE OF THE WORKFORCE WHO CAME HERE TO BUILD THE WEB?
BUT YOU LOST YOUR BABY DAUGHTER?
YES... NO... ...I CAN'T REMEMBER...
YOU DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER, DO YOU? IT STILL HURTS TOO MUCH...
BUT I'VE BEEN HURT, TOO... NEVER KNOWING WHO MY MOTHER WAS...
UNTIL NOW...
BUT LET ME DO THE TALKING NOW... THE REMEMBERING...
I WAS BROUGHT UP IN A DOMED CITY... BORN THERE, FOR ALL I KNEW AT THE TIME...
A COOL PLACE, THE DOME ... AIR STERILISED, ENVIRONMENT CONTROLLED... A CITY SEALED UNDER GLASS...
AS A CHILD, I ASKED NO QUESTIONS... DOME CITIZENS HAVE NO PARENTS, OFFICIALLY...
AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN, I BECAME A RESEARCH ASSISTANT IN THE DATA BANK OF THE CITY'S CONTROL CENTRE...
I WAS IN THE HISTORY SECTION... AND THERE I LEARNED ABOUT THE PAST... AND THE OUTSIDE...

AXA RECALLS HER LIFE IN THE DOMED CITY...
IT'S ALL TAPED HERE... HISTORY OF THE WORLD UNTIL THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE GREAT CONTAMINATION...
AND THEN... NOTHING!
NOTHING MORE TO RECORD...
1150
BUT A CENTURY HAS PASSED SINCE THEN... AND LIFE MUST HAVE GONE ON, EVEN IN THE OUTSIDE...
AND HISTORY IS PEOPLE... THEIR STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE...
STOP IT, AXA!
MEN BUILDING NEW CITIES... WOMEN HAVING BABIES... PEOPLE WHO MIGHT BE MY OWN FATHER AND MOTHER...
YOU'VE BROKEN INTO MY DESK! LISTENED TO THE SECRET TAPE!
I WISH I'D NEVER FOUND THAT TAPE IN CENTRAL DATA! OR LISTENED TO IT! OR KEPT IT!
MEG...
DON'T TOUCH ME! IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!
1152
I GREW FOND OF YOU! THE FIRST RULE I'VE BROKEN IN FORTY YEARS! AFFECTION IS FORBIDDEN!
FACTS ARE ALL THAT MATTER IN THE DOME! NOT FEELINGS! NOT EMOTION!
DATA! PRINT-OUTS! TAPES!
SO WHY HAVEN'T I A COMPUTER IN HERE? INSTEAD OF A HEART?
TROLER
1153

AAH!
IT'S THE LIBRARIAN, SHE'S...ILL...
HYSTERIA, EH?
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HER?
RECON-DITIONING, MAYBE...
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
SHE'LL NEED SOMEONE WITH HER... A FRIEND...
WATCH IT, AXA... OR YOU'LL HAVE TO BE RECONDITIONED, TOO...
A FORBIDDEN WORD IN THE DOME... BUT THAT'S WHAT WE ARE... FRIENDS...
AXA RECALLS HER LAST DAYS IN THE DOMED CITY...
THE MEDICS HAVE TAKEN MEG TO THE RECONDITIONING UNIT...
A WASTE OF TIME, EXAMINING HER...
SHE'S FORTY-PLUS, ANYWAY...
OBSOLETE, AS WELL AS DEFECTIVE...
WHAT ARE THEY DOING WITH THE POOR OLD THING?
NO! THEY CAN'T BE!
YOU HERE?
OH... MEG...
KABOOM

SHE WAS MALFUNCTIONING... REPRESSED EMOTIONS IMPLODED... HAPPENS EVERY DAY TO MIDDLEAGED DOME CITIZENS...
BUT YOU'VE... INCINERATED HER!
THEY'RE WORKING ON THE PROBLEM IN GENETIC ENGINEERING... MEANWHILE THE LOGICAL ANSWER IS ELIMINATION...
I HATE YOUR LOGIC! MEG WAS A HUMAN BEING! AND YOU'VE KILLED HER!
BUT SHE'S YOUNG... WE COULD RE-CONDITION HER...
DANGEROUS SYNDROME, HYSTERIA... HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS...
NO! YOU'RE NOT TURNING ME INTO A VEGETABLE!
MEG TALKED ABOUT A SECRET TAPE... LOCKED IN HER DESK...
SHE SAID SHE'D FOUND IT IN CENTRAL DATA... ACCUSED ME OF LISTENING TO IT...
MAYBE IT'S TIME I DID JUST THAT...
SO LET'S HEAR THIS SECRET TAPE...
LEX TO CONTROLLER, DOMED CITY! DON'T TAKE MY BABY DAUGHTER AWAY FROM ME!
ALL RIGHT, I'M A DOME CITIZEN AND I'VE COHABITED WITH AN OUTSIDER... SO EXILE ME, BUT LET ME KEEP AXA!

IF YOU MUST TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME, LET THE BABY'S MOTHER KEEP HER WITH THE OTHER OUTSIDERS IN PILL CITY...
A SECRET TAPE...
AXA WAS BORN FREE... DON'T TRY TO DEHUMANISE HER IN THE DOME... OR SHE'LL END UP A WANDERING REBEL LIKE ME...
CLICK
OH... FATHER!
SO NOW I KNOW WHO MY PARENTS WERE... A DOME SCIENTIST AND AN OUTSIDER GIRL...
BUT THERE'S STILL A LOT I DON'T KNOW...
AND ONLY ONE PLACE TO FIND OUT MORE...
SHOULDN'T WE LEAVE THE DOOR LOCKED?
FOR FIVE MINUTES? POINTLESS!
AND WHO'D DARE TO ENTER CENTRAL DATA WITHOUT AUTHORISATION?
I WOULD...
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PARENTS? THAT'S WHAT I'VE GOT TO KNOW!
AXA. ALL INFO CLASSIFIED
YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME, AXA...

THE CONTROLLER! YOU MUST KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT ME...
PERHAPS...
BUT IN THE DOME, THE TRUTH IS WHAT WE CHOOSE TO TELL YOU...
IF YOU REFUSE TO ACCEPT IT, WE HAVE WAYS OF CORRECTING YOUR DISBELIEF
NO!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BRAINWASH ME!
OR ELIMINATE ME, AS YOU DID THAT HARMLESS OLD LIBRARIAN!
I'VE LEARNT ONE TRUTH, THANKS TO MY FATHER... A FACT YOU CAN'T CHANGE ...I WAS BORN FREE!
SO WHY DON'T I KEEP ON RUNNING?
AXA RECALLING HER REBELLIOUS PAST...
LET'S FACE IT, I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A MISFIT IN THE DOMED CITY...
WHERE PEOPLE WHO THINK FOR THEMSELVES ARE RECONDITIONED...
AND HEARTS ARE KEPT AS STERILE AS THE STREETS...
I WAS BORN OUTSIDE... MY MOTHER AN OUTSIDER...
NO SCIENTIST ADJUSTED MY DNA PATTERN, AS THEY DO HERE IN GENETIC ENGINEERING FOR THEIR DOME CITIZENS...
I'M A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD!

INCUBATION UNIT
SOON THE DOME SCIENTISTS WILL REFINE THE CLUMSY PROCESS OF CHILD-BIRTH...
MOTHERS AND FATHERS WILL BE REPLACED BY GENETIC MACHINERY... WOMBS BY TEST TUBES...
THE CHANCE THAT PRODUCED A REBEL LIKE ME WILL BE ELIMINATED...
STOP! RANDOM MOVEMENT IS FORBIDDEN!
HUH?
PHEW! IT'S THE DOME CHILDREN THEY'RE TALKING TO ...DRILLING INTO SUBMISSION...
THEY TRIED IT ON ME... AND FAILED...
I MUST BE NEAR THE OUTER ZONE NOW...
THIS IS THE LIBIDO RELEASE UNIT... WHERE YOUNG DOME CITIZENS ARE ALLOWED TO PLEASURE EACH OTHER, MILDLY...
YOU CAME TO ME AXA...
JON!
DON'T SOUND SO SURPRISED...
YES, I KNOW...
YOU KNOW I'VE ALWAYS WANTED US TO PLEASURE EACH OTHER, AXA...
SO LET ME GO! TO THE OUTSIDE, WHERE PEOPLE CALL IT LOVE!

AXA RELIVES HER MOMENT OF REBELLION...
I'M LEAVING THE DOMED CITY! GET OUT OF MY WAY, JON!
NO!
YOU'RE ONE OF US! DISCIPLINED, GENETICALLY-PURE... THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE OF THE DOME!
FREE IS BEAUTIFUL!
IT ALL SEEMS A LONG WHILE AGO... MY ESCAPE FROM THE DOME...
I'M A WOMAN!
WE CAN CLASSIFY THE SUSPECT AXA— TO REBEL CONFIRMED!
WHAT DID I HOPE TO FIND, IN THE OUTSIDE?
FREEDOM, OF COURSE...
A LIFE OF MY OWN... EVEN IF IT MEANT SUFFERING...
AND I FOUND PLENTY OF SUFFERING, IN A WORLD DEVASTATED BY THE NUCLEAR STORMS AND POLLUTION OF THE GREAT CONTAMINATION...
1977
BUT I FOUND HOPE IN THE OUTSIDE, TOO... AND THE HAPPINESS THAT IS SIMPLY LIVING...
ABOVE ALL, I WAS FREE... TO CARVE OUT MY OWN DESTINY...
... IN A WORLD FULL OF WONDERS... ECHOES OF THE PAST AND FUTURE... DINOSAURS AND ROBOTS...

SOMEWHERE, OUT HERE, WAS MY BIRTHPLACE... AND MY PARENTS, STILL LIVING PERHAPS...
AND ONE THING I NEVER FORGOT, IN ALL MY WANDERINGS THROUGH THE STRANGE WORLD OF THE OUTSIDE...
AND SO I CAME TO THE WEB... AND TO YOU, VITA...
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT, AXA... YOU FRIGHTEN ME...
I'M AN OLD WOMAN... HAGGARD AND BITTER... FUDDLED BY DRUGS...
YOU'RE MY... MOTHER!
NOW I'VE FOUND YOU, MOTHER, I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU...
MY TRAVELS ARE OVER... I SHALL STAY HERE WITH YOU, IN PILL CITY...
NO! YOU MUSTN'T!
QUINN WILL HAVE YOU! HE TAKES EVERY PRETTY GIRL WHO COMES HERE!
NO MAN TAKES ME!
BUT IF I CAN'T STAY HERE, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO...

I'LL LEAVE PILL CITY... AND TAKE YOU WITH ME!
YOU'LL NEED SERVICEABLE CLOTHES...
AXA... WAIT...
NO TIME TO WAIT, MOTHER! WE MUST ESCAPE TONIGHT!
BUT I'M ILL... WEAK...
I'M STRONG ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US, MOTHER!
AND WE'LL BE TOGETHER! THAT'S WHAT MATTERS!
WITH YOU BESIDE ME, I SHALL BE TWICE AS STRONG!
BUT QUINN WILL TRY TO STOP US...
HE WON'T EVEN KNOW WE'VE GONE...
WE'LL ESCAPE ACROSS THE WEB... HERE COMES A CABLE-CAR NOW...
HIDE THERE, MOTHER... WHILE I DEAL WITH THE CREW...
BUT THE MEN IN THE CAPSULE WILL BE ARMED! YOU CAN'T FIGHT THEM!
YOU DON'T KNOW ME!
WE DO, THOUGH! THAT'S OUR AXA!

FRIENDS, NOT ENEMIES. CONFRONT AXA...
MATT! IT'S YOU!
ROBOT MARK HELPED ME TO ESCAPE FROM THE PEASANTS AND HIJACK THE CABLE-CAR...
WE CAME HERE TO RESCUE YOU FROM THE DISPENSERS...
OH NO! A POWER CUT!
THE CREW OF THE CABLE-CAR MUST HAVE ALERTED THE DISPENSERS!
SO WE CAN'T USE THE CAR NOW, TO ESCAPE ACROSS THE WEB!
QUINN HAS TRAPPED YOU HERE! I KNEW HE'D NEVER LET YOU GO!
THERE'S STILL ONE WAY OF ESCAPE...
BY ELEVATOR DOWN THE CENTRAL SHAFT OF THE WEB... AND OUT INTO THE JUNGLE AT GROUND LEVEL...
BUT YOU MUST HURRY!
YOU TOO, VITA! YOU'RE COMING WITH US, REMEMBER?
SHE'S COMING WITH US, AXA? WHO THE HELL IS SHE?
MY MOTHER!
YOU MUST BE JOKING!

YOUR MAN DESPISES ME, AXA...
OF COURSE HE DOESN'T...
IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM, ANYWAY! YOU'RE MY MOTHER, AND YOU'RE COMING WITH US...
BUT...
AXA, WAIT! I DON'T CARE WHO THAT WOMAN IS... SHE CAN'T TRAVEL WITH US!
HELL, LOOK AT HER! SHE WOULDN'T LAST A WEEK IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE OUTSIDE!
I DON'T CARE...
LOOK AT HER, AXA... NOW!
A STOREROOM IN PILL CITY...
GO ON, AXA, LOOK AT HER! THIS WOMAN YOU CALL YOUR MOTHER!
DRUGS! I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT THEM!
OH NO...
OH YES...
STOP, MOTHER! YOU DON'T NEED DRUGS NOW! YOU'VE GOT ME!
YOU? CAN YOU DULL THE AGONY? BLOT OUT THE PAST?
ONLY THESE PILLS HELP ME TO FORGET! BOTTLED OBLIVION!

I CAN'T!
DROP THE WOMAN, AXA...
SHE'S MY MOTHER!
ALL RIGHT, DON'T TELL ME! I KNOW! SHE'S ALSO A DRUG ADDICT!
NO DRUGS IN THE OUTSIDE... GOT TO TAKE THEM WITH ME...
STOP THINKING OF YOURSELF, WOMAN!
WHAT ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER? YOU'RE CRUCIFYING HER!
OH, MOTHER... AFTER SO MANY YEARS, I'VE FOUND YOU...DON'T SAY NOW THAT IT'S TOO LATE...
MOTHER? DAUGHTER? WHAT ARE YOU ALL TALKING ABOUT?
THE DRUGS CONFUSE ME... BUT NOT ALL THE TIME... NOT NOW...
AXA IS NOT MY DAUGHTER!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
YOU HEARD ME, AXA!
YOU'RE NOT MY DAUGHTER!
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT! ACCUSING ME! HATING ME!

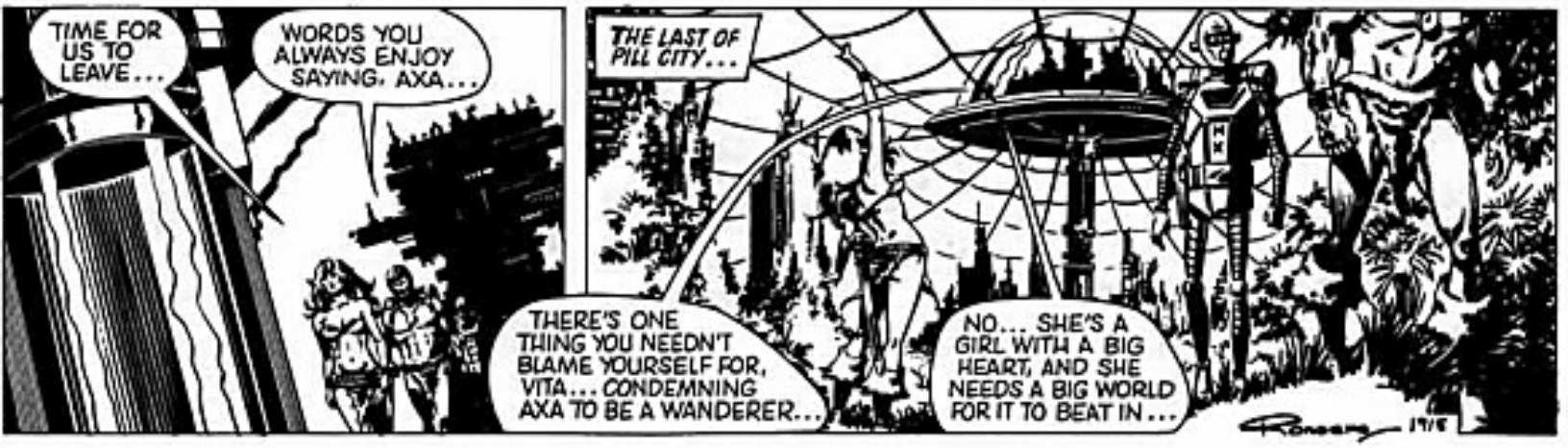
I DON'T UNDERSTAND... YOU TOLD ME YOURSELF YOU'D HAD A DAUGHTER... A BABY YOU'D LOST...
THAT BABY MUST HAVE BEEN ME...
IT WAS, AXA...
QUINN!
LET ME LOOK AFTER MY POOR VITA, FIRST...
SHE'S HAD A TRAUMATIC SHOCK... IT'S MADE HER FACE THE TRUTH, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN TWENTY YEARS...
SO WHAT IS THE TRUTH?
TO START WITH, VITA IS NOT MY WIFE...
SHE'S MY SISTER... MY ELDER SISTER, AND ONCE THE CONTROLLER OF PILL CITY...
SHE'LL SLEEP NOW... THE ONLY RELIEF SHE GETS FROM THE MEMORIES THAT TORMENT HER
I KNOW, VITA'S A DRUG ADDICT... BUT SHE WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THAT...
AND YOU PLAYED A PART IN HER FALL, AXA...
TELL ME ABOUT VITA, THEN... AND HOW I WRECKED HER LIFE...
OH, IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT, AXA... YOU WERE JUST A BABY...
BUT I'D BETTER START AT THE BEGINNING... BEFORE THE WEB AND THE SPHERE WERE BUILT...
THE PILL CITY OF THOSE DAYS WAS A HUDDLE OF DERELICT LABORATORIES, BURIED IN THE JUNGLE... UNTIL VITA HAD A DREAM...

VITA DREAMT OF A CITY IN THE SKY... AND SHE HAD THE WILLPOWER TO MAKE HER DREAM COME TRUE...
"SCIENTISTS FROM A DOOMED CITY WERE HERE, SEEKING DRUGS AND THE KNOW-HOW TO PRODUCE THEM..."
"IN RETURN FOR OUR SECRETS, VITA PERSUADED THE SCIENTISTS TO DESIGN AND BUILD THE WEB..."
1902
ONE OF THE DOME SCIENTISTS WHO BUILT THE WEB WAS A YOUNG MAN NAMED LEX...
"HE WAS HANDSOME AND INTELLIGENT... AND VITA FELL IN LOVE WITH HIM..."
"SHE HAD REPRESSED HER EMOTIONS FOR YEARS... HER LOVE WAS FIERCE... BUT INCAPABLE OF EXPRESSION..."
1903
AFTER WEEKS OF TORMENT, VITA STEELED HERSELF TO TELL LEX THAT SHE LOVED HIM...
"SHE WAS TOO LATE... HE HAD FALLEN IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER GIRL... ONE OF THE HUMBLE SUBJECTS WHOM VITA RULED..."
"EVEN MORE INTOLERABLE... THE GIRL WAS PREGNANT..."
"VITA'S JEALOUS RAGE WAS TERRIBLE..."
1905
SHE WOULDN'T LISTEN TO MY PLEAS... OR THE ARGUMENTS OF THE DOME SCIENTISTS...
"SHE DROVE LEX AND THE GIRL HE LOVED... PREGNANT AS SHE WAS... OUT OF PILL CITY INTO THE WILDERNESS OF THE OUTSIDE..."

A FEW MONTHS LATER, THE DOME CITY AUTHORITIES SENT AN ARMED PATROL TO TRACK DOWN THE COUPLE WHO HAD BEEN DRIVEN BY VITA INTO THE WILDERNESS...
"IT TOOK MORE MONTHS FOR THE DOME GUARDS TO PICK UP THE TRAIL OF LEX AND HIS LOVER, AND THE BABY WHICH HAD BEEN BORN TO THEM BY NOW..."
"THE BABY WAS YOU, AXA... AND IT WAS YOU THE AUTHORITIES WANTED..."
NO ONE CARED WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PARENTS...
"BUT THE AUTHORITIES WERE CURIOUS ABOUT THEIR CHILD... OFFSPRING OF A DOME FATHER AND A MOTHER FROM THE OUTSIDE..."
"THEY WANTED TO STUDY THE BABY'S PERSONALITY...THE INFLUENCE OF INHERITED AND PARTLY UNCONTROLLED GENES."
EVEN AT THAT AGE, AXA, YOU WERE A REBEL...
"BUT YOU COULDN'T STOP THE GUARDS SNATCHING YOU AWAY TO THE DOMED CITY... AND NOR COULD YOUR FATHER..."
"YOUR PARENTS WERE LEFT IN THE WILDERNESS OF THE OUTSIDE... THE LAST ANYONE HAS EVER HEARD OF THEM..."
VITA HAD GOT HER REVENGE... BUT NOW SHE FELT A GUILT AS TERRIBLE AS HER REVENGE HAD BEEN...
"TO DULL HER MISERY, SHE TURNED TO A COMFORT ALWAYS AT HAND IN PILL CITY... NARCOTICS..."
AND IN HER TWILIGHT WORLD OF DRUGS, SHE CAME TO BELIEVE IT WAS SHE WHO HAD MOTHERED THE BABY GIRL... SHE WHO HAD LOST IT...

A SAD OLD STORY TOLD...
SO NOW YOU'VE FILLED IN ALL THE BLANKS, AXA...
NOT ALL OF THEM, MATT...
BUT ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT IT'S THE FUTURE WHICH MATTERS ...NOT THE PAST...
YOU'RE HAPPY THEN, AXA, NOW?
A MEANINGLESS WORD ...LET'S JUST SAY I'M WISER...
I KNOW MORE ABOUT THE FORCES WHICH SHAPED ME... MADE ME WHAT I AM...
IF THINGS HAD WORKED OUT DIFFERENTLY, AXA, YOU MIGHT HAVE GROWN UP HERE IN PILL CITY...
YES, THE HOME I'VE NEVER HAD AND SOMETIMES YEARNED FOR...
A WINDY PLACE IN THE SKY, WITH WIDE HORIZONS...
BUT I LIKE TO CROSS THE HORIZON, NOT JUST TO LOOK AT IT...
A FEW DAYS LATER...
DRUGS! HRMPH!
WE ALL KNOW ROBOTS DON'T NEED THEM!
YOU MUSTN'T BE TOO HARD ON US HUMANS, MARK... WE HAVE A LOT OF PAIN TO BEAR...
YOU UNDERSTAND, AXA, DON'T YOU?

VITA! HOW ARE YOU?
BETTER KNOWING THAT YOU DON'T HATE ME...
IT ALL HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO!
BUT I DON'T FORGIVE MYSELF...
ONLY YOU'VE LEARNT TO LIVE WITH YOUR MEMORIES NOW, VITA... THANKS TO AXA...


TIME FOR US TO LEAVE...
WORDS YOU ALWAYS ENJOY SAYING, AXA...
THE LAST OF PILL CITY...
THERE'S ONE THING YOU NEEDN'T BLAME YOURSELF FOR, VITA... CONDEMNING AXA TO BE A WANDERER...
NO... SHE'S A GIRL WITH A BIG HEART, AND SHE NEEDS A BIG WORLD FOR IT TO BEAT IN...